

Norfolk Southern CEO Hearing Statement:

Thank you, Chair Carper. I want to first recognize all of the Ohioans here this morning – Annie Vogel with the Ohio EPA, and all the residents of East Palestine who made the trip.

The mothers here today represent Ohioans in this tightknit town in Columbiana County, which once made 80 percent of the ceramics in this country, before those jobs – like so many in our state – moved overseas where companies pay workers less.

It's the kind of community that's so often forgotten or exploited by corporate America.

Now, these Ohioans are worried about whether their water is safe to drink and their air is safe to breathe, whether their kids will get sick, whether their crops are contaminated, whether they'll still be able to do business and attract investment to their community.

In my visits to East Palestine, I've talked with residents – Mayor Conaway, Fire Chief Drabick, business owners, parents. I've heard their fears for what this means for their town – for their futures.

All because a big corporation, Norfolk Southern, chose to invest much of its massive profits in making its executives and shareholders wealthier, at the expense of the Ohio communities along its rail tracks like East Palestine and Steubenville and Sandusky and Springfield.

The company followed the Wall Street business model: boost profits by cutting costs, at all costs – the consequences for places like East Palestine be damned.

In ten years, Norfolk Southern eliminated 38 percent of its workers.

Think of that – in a decade, they cut more than a third of their jobs.

And we've seen what the company did with their massive profits.

Norfolk Southern spent \$3.4 billion on stock buybacks last year. That's money that could have gone to hiring inspectors, to putting more hotbox detectors along its rail lines, to having more workers available to repair tracks and rail cars.

Norfolk Southern's profits have gone up and up...and look what happened.

The NTSB is conducting a “special investigation” into Norfolk Southern and its culture, investigating five significant accidents since December 2021 – including three accidents that resulted in the death of Norfolk Southern employee.

If Norfolk Southern had paid a little more attention to safety and a little less attention to its profits – had cared a little more about the Ohioans along its tracks, and a little less about its executives and shareholders – these accidents would not have been as bad, or might not have happened at all.

Just this week in Cleveland, a Norfolk Southern conductor and BLET member was killed on the job. Louis Shuster was the proud father to a 16 year old son.

It’s Norfolk Southern’s responsibility to keep its workers safe on the job. On Tuesday, Mr. Shuster went to work to do his job. But this company has failed to do its job, over and over.

[Pause]

When I talk with Ohioans about what they want to see from this company in response to the disaster in East Palestine, I hear two things:

First, Norfolk Southern must pay for every cent of the cleanup.

Every water test, every hotel room, every bottle of water, every hospital bill if an Ohioan comes down sick because of these contaminants next week, next year, for the next 10 years.

We know this company can afford it.

My colleague Senator Vance and I and our Ohio delegation – members of both parties – have come together to make those demands of Norfolk Southern.

Today, Ohioans expect to hear a firm commitment from this company's CEO that it will pay whatever it costs, for as long as it takes, to make this community whole.

Second, Ohioans want assurances that this will not happen again.

They have every right to be scared.

On Saturday evening, just a month after the company's disaster in East Palestine, another Norfolk Southern train derailed in Springfield, Ohio.

This time the cars that derailed weren't carrying hazardous materials – but other cars on the train were.

The only thing that saved Ohioans from another disaster was luck.

We need a little more than that.

It's why Senator Vance and I have come together to introduce our **bipartisan Railway Safety Act**, to **make trains safer** as they go through communities like East Palestine.

It shouldn't take a train derailment for elected officials to put partisanship aside and work together for the people we serve – not corporations like Norfolk Southern.

Lobbyists for the rail companies spent years fighting every effort to strengthen rules to make our trains and rail lines safer.

Now Ohioans are paying the price.

If this company is serious in its commitment to preventing more East Palestines all over Ohio and the country, I hope that today Mr. Shaw will endorse our commonsense, bipartisan plan.

Senator Vance and I come from different parties, but on this we've come together for the people of our state. I appreciate his work with us on this.

The response to this crisis has been far too partisan. Today is an opportunity to change that.

Senator Vance and I are both listening to the same Ohioans in this community – people who feel like they have no way to stand up to a company like Norfolk Southern, and are worried about what will happen when the cameras pack up and leave.

These Ohio communities have been abandoned too many times before.

My job – our job – is to be their voice, and to demand corporate accountability for bringing this town back to the vibrant Ohio community we know it can be.

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